

NEWS

United States Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney, District of New Jersey
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Christopher J. Christie, U.S. Attorney

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Manager and Employees of a Trenton Neighborhood Grocery Store Admit Embezzling from the Food Stamp Program

(More)

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TRENTON – The manager and three employees of a small neighborhood grocery store located in Trenton pleaded guilty yesterday to embezzling from the U.S. Food Stamp Program, U.S. Attorney Christopher J. Christie announced.

Elisa Polanco, 42, manager of Spring Supermarket, located at 201 Spring Street, and store employees, Ydelso Polanco, 41, a.k.a. "Luis Polanco," and "Tony," of Trenton, Fortuna Polanco, 52, of Morrisville, Pa., and Silvano Xenos, 60, a.k.a. "Cuba," address unknown, pleaded guilty on Thursday, Jan. 4, 2007, before U.S. District Judge Anne E. Thompson to separate one-count Informations charging embezzlement from the food stamp program. Judge Thompson continued the defendants' \$100,000 unsecured bond bail packages pending sentencing, which is scheduled for April 24.

An investigation by Special Agents of the USDA Office of Inspector General, with the assistance of agents from the U.S. Secret Service, into food stamp trafficking by food retailers authorized to redeem food stamps in exchange for the purchase of food, but who unlawfully redeemed food stamps in exchange for cash or the purchase of non-food items resulted in a Criminal Complaint charging the defendants each with one count of embezzling Food Stamp benefits, which are funded by the United States Department of Agriculture. The Complaint was unsealed following the arrests of the defendants on May 25, 2006.

According to the complaint, Elisa Polanco, managed and operated the Spring Supermarket. The complaint also states that Ydelso Polanco, Fortuna Polanco and Silvano Xenos, worked in the store. The Complaint alleges that between March 2001 and March 2006 the defendants embezzled more than \$1 million in funds from the food stamp program.

The embezzlement count carries a maximum statutory sentence of 10 years in prison and a fine of up to \$250,000.

In determining an actual sentence, Judge Thompson will consult the advisory U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which provide appropriate sentencing ranges that take into account the severity and characteristics of the offense, the defendant's criminal history, if any, and other factors. The judge, however, is not bound by those guidelines in determining a sentence.

Parole has been abolished in the federal system. Defendants who are given custodial terms must serve nearly all that time.

Christie credited Special Agents of the Department of Agriculture - Office of Inspector General, under the direction of Inspector General Phyllis Fong, with assistance provided by U.S. Secret Service Trenton Resident Office, under the direction of Resident Agent in Charge Anthony F. Colgary, with the investigation of the case.

The Government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorney Peter Katz of the Criminal Division in Trenton.

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Defense Attorneys:

Elisa Polanco - Murray Gendzel, Esq. Trenton

Ydelso Polanco - John Holliday, Esq. Lawrenceville

Fortuna Polanco - Josh Markowitz, Esq. Lawrenceville

Silvano Xenos - Brian Reilly, Esq. Assistant Federal Public Defender